W Talks

Productivity in Practice

Exploring productivity and how leading organisations are responding.

IT TAKES A LITTLE

Aquaculture farm, Humpty Doo Barramundi, is a family-owned aquaculture farm located on the banks of the Adelaide River in the Northern Territory, halfway between Darwin and Kakadu National Park.

Productivity as a competitive advantage

While productivity is often discussed as a national challenge, the biggest gains start with decisions made inside Australia's individual businesses.

Welcome to this edition of W Talks, where we explore one of the most important drivers of business performance and long-term economic prosperity: productivity.

For many business owners, productivity can feel like an economic concept reserved for policymakers and economists. In reality, it is deeply practical. Productivity influences competitiveness, profitability, wages and growth, and is shaped by the everyday decisions businesses make about people, technology, processes and investment.

As the report explains, boosting productivity is one of the main ways we raise living standards, but growth in productivity has been slow over the past 20 years in Australia and overseas. It is no surprise, then, that this has spurred a national policy debate about how to lift productivity, including last year's government roundtable.

Take it from an economist: the jargon should not obscure what is, in practice, a basic issue. All we usually mean by 'productivity' is the amount of value added per hour worked. It literally is just "Stuff Divided by Time". Sometimes "Stuff" is hard to measure, especially for health and other sectors that do not sell their output into a market, but the underlying idea is not so complex.

Too often, the discussion around productivity treats it as something that is imposed on businesses from outside, or perhaps something that the government is responsible for. The policy conversation is full of proposals to improve the nation's productivity by changing the tax system or regulation.

What the case studies in this report demonstrate, though, is that productivity comes from the decisions of individual businesses about how they use their time and resources. From medical services to wellness centres to barramundi production, these businesses have all found ways to improve their product. They have used new technology to get more out of their own data and make better decisions.

Academic research points to slow adoption of technology as a reason for slow productivity growth in Australia and overseas. Our showcase businesses demonstrate that AI can make data analysis techniques that previously required advanced statistical training more accessible. They also show that successfully introducing new technologies or methods into any organisation relies on getting the transition and the culture right. This might be easier said than done, but it is a path to success that is within reach for many businesses.

Luci Ellis
Chief Economist, Westpac Group

Unpacking the productivity challenge

Five key themes emerge as this report explores the complexities around Australia's flagging productivity to deliver some thought-provoking and practical resolutions.

Productivity is fundamental to Australia's long-term prosperity, business competitiveness and rising living standards. Yet productivity growth has slowed for decades, creating a conundrum for business and policymakers.

The Productivity Commission[1] defines productivity as the measurement of how efficiently inputs, such as labour, capital or raw materials, are used to produce outputs, like goods or services.

As artificial intelligence (AI) continues to evolve, it presents new opportunities to address this challenge, alongside advances in tech, workforce design, leadership and organisational culture.

This latest W Talks report explores the productivity debate through the experiences of successful business leaders. Drawing on frontline insights, it examines the forces shaping productivity and the practical strategies businesses are using to improve performance in a changing economic and demographic environment.

One size may not fit all

While there is a well-established measure of productivity, there is no single solution to lifting productivity across industries. Some sectors outperform others due to differences in technology, management practices and investment.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) measures labour productivity using Gross Value Added (GVA), which represents the value of output produced by an industry minus the inputs, such as materials, services and energy, used in production. Labour productivity is then calculated by dividing GVA by the number of hours worked during the period.

Labour productivity in agriculture rose by 68 per cent over the two decades to the end of 2025. Productivity in the healthcare and construction industries, however, has largely moved sideways over the same period. While aggregate data reveals what's happening, high-performing businesses often reveal why it is happening and how productivity can be improved.

How Australia measures up

Australia ranks around 16th among OECD economies[2] on measures of labour productivity. Structural factors, including our distance from major markets and innovation hubs, present challenges, but greater adoption of technology and stronger management practices could help businesses compete closer to the global frontier.

Productivity measures also have limitations. While they capture how efficiently resources are used, they do not fully reflect improvements in quality and outcomes in sectors such as health and education, nor broader societal benefits that Australians value.

Exploring the human-machine equation and the promise of AI

Digitisation and AI have the potential to transform productivity, particularly for organisations that redesign work to combine technology with uniquely human capabilities such as creativity, adaptability and judgement. While the long-term labour market impacts are still emerging, AI is expected to play a significant role in lifting productivity across skilled sectors and accelerating skills-based workforce models.

EY modelling estimates widespread AI adoption could increase Australia's GDP by between A$95 billion and A$116 billion by 2036. Beyond automation, AI's greatest opportunity may be helping organisations make better decisions, innovate faster and create new sources of value.[3]

Delivering on diversity

The impact of AI may be transformative, but competitive advantage will also require the application of human skills – and these skills will be drawn from a workforce that is more diverse than ever. The latest arrivals, Gen Z, are seeking clear growth paths, a sense of belonging and a connection to purpose. Diversity extends beyond age and may be key to harnessing the breadth of human skills for success in the AI era.

Powering the next wave

Finding the right support, as well as the capital and tools to help power up business productivity is vital. Whether it's bringing on a new tech stack, automation or other new equipment, businesses need funds for growth, alongside strategies to improve cash flow and working capital.

Throughout this report, business leaders share how they are applying these productivity levers in practice, including:

- A medical industry innovator in regional Queensland employing AI to drive efficiency and financial sustainability across general practice;
- The Founder and CEO of Australia's biggest wellness network, whose investment in culture and education is helping relieve productivity pressure;
- The CEO of the country's largest producer of saltwater barramundi, whose Top End business thrives on diverse perspectives, inclusion and innovation.

The productivity challenge will not be solved by technology alone. The businesses best positioned for success will be those that combine smarter tools with stronger leadership, adaptable workforces and cultures that enable innovation.

The opportunity is not simply to do more with less, but to create new ways of working that deliver greater value, growth and return on investment.

Time to see the big picture

Productivity is the engine of economic growth, powering higher wages and living standards, stronger businesses and long-term prosperity, but in Australia and other advanced economies, that engine has slowed markedly. Why?

Stark figures tell the story. The most-used measure of productivity is GVA per hour worked. Using this measure, Australia's labour productivity rose by around 13 per cent in the decade to 2015 but increased by just 3 per cent in the decade to 2025, highlighting the sharp slowdown in productivity growth.

The Productivity Commission and the RBA flag productivity as a challenge[4]. So, what's holding it back – and how can we get it firing again?

The Demographics Group, led by renowned Australian futurist and demographer Bernard Salt AM, was commissioned by Westpac to identify the factors impacting Australia's productivity.

In doing so, he noted that industries differ in their structures and how they create value, so the productivity challenges they face differ, and so do the solutions.

"There is significant productivity variability in the economy," says Salt. "For example, agriculture as a sector is a leader in productivity. Its gross value-added per hour worked increased by more than 68 per cent over the two decades to the end of calendar 2025, thanks largely to the uptake of technology via, for example, automation and mechanisation, as well as operational efficiencies."

Quality matters

While aggregate industry figures point to productivity variations, Dr Aruna Sathanapally, CEO of independent Australian public policy think tank, the Grattan Institute, says they don't account for quality of output in sectors where prices are not set in markets.

"There are areas where Australia has gotten better, we just don't measure the value of activity particularly well," she says. "The health system is a great example – we've made real strides in people's quality of life and healthy life expectancy, but that doesn't show up in our productivity numbers. So, part of what we're seeing with the productivity slowdown is that some things we don't measure particularly well are becoming a bigger and bigger part of our economy."

This productivity conundrum also points to what Salt describes as a 'quality-of-life trade-off'. "Australians make choices that aren't always driven by productivity," he says. "We allocate funding, support, workers and expertise to healthcare and education, and we invest in the arts and recreation. We see social benefit in the noble pursuit of a balanced economy and a cohesive society."

AI and the new world of work

Over the past 30 years, highly skilled jobs have expanded from 25 per cent of the workforce to 38 per cent, while lesser skilled roles have contracted.

"What's required over the coming decade is ever-greater efficiency in the most highly skilled sectors of the workforce, which may come in part through the use of AI," says Salt.

However, technology is just one part of productivity uplift.

"The optimistic case for AI is that it enables each of us to get the most out of ourselves — that a workplace can give people better tools so they can do higher-quality work," says Sathanapally.

"We're at the point where we need to start thinking consciously about what we want from AI, rather than just waiting to see how it pans out," she adds. "That's what's in businesses' hands – determining what you are trying to achieve with this technology and having a conversation with your workforce about the objective."

Technology can help businesses boost productivity when combined with strategies across leadership, culture and workforce design. "Productivity is about return on effort," concludes Salt. "It's not just about putting more effort into a machine."

Prompting the great AI redesign

Businesses across the economy must tackle the productivity challenge to bridge the widening gap between the living standards we want and those the economy can sustain, writes Westpac Chief Economist Luci Ellis.

Productivity is the backbone of rising living standards. Over time, wages and incomes can only rise in a durable way if we get more output from each hour worked. That can happen because workers have more skills, or more and better capital to work with, or because we find better ways of combining people, machines and know-how. Economists call that last piece 'multifactor productivity', or MFP. It sounds technical, but the idea is simple: it is the value of working smarter.

Growth in productivity has slowed since the turn of the century. This has sparked concern and much policy discussion in Australia but is also true for most other advanced economies. The computer and internet wave of the late 1990s delivered large gains, especially once firms changed how they worked. More recent technologies, such as social media, were far less game-changing. Regulation, weaker business dynamism and a shift towards services also seem to have played a role.

The Australian story

Some Australia-specific factors have also contributed. The mining boom boosted incomes and output, but that one-off free kick has faded. Mining is highly productive in level terms, but its productivity is volatile and affected by project cycles.

At the same time, more of the economy's labour has shifted into care and other non-market services, where measured productivity is lower and harder to lift. This has been a particular issue in Australia, where the 'care economy' has expanded in recent years because of explicit government policy.

Riding tech waves

Researchers overseas have also highlighted that slower average growth in productivity partly stems from a widening gap between the most productive "superstar" firms and other firms. Australia does have innovative firms. We have quietly grown a software industry that now generates A$9.5 billion in exports a year – almost as much as Australia's wheat industry.

We also have strengths in research, design, data and specialist business services. But the latest research from Treasury and elsewhere suggests that most Australian firms are taking longer to catch up to best practice than they used to.

This is where the current technology wave matters. Artificial intelligence, data tools and automation could help lift productivity, but only if firms use them to change their business models and offerings.

The history of railways, electricity, computers and the internet shows that the biggest gains only came once businesses reorganised around the new technology, and entire new product lines emerged. The early phase of technology adoption often looks disappointing because people are learning, systems are being rebuilt and some old capital becomes less useful. There can be a J-curve: costs rise before the benefits show up.

Doing things differently

The challenge for business – and Australia more broadly – is not about adopting technology for its own sake, or about incremental efficiency gains in existing processes. The greatest gains come when technology creates the conditions for new products and new ways of doing things.

Management and decision-making also need to speed up if they are to avoid becoming the bottleneck in the move to AI-enabled processes. That requires investment in skills, data quality, management capability and experimentation.

The productivity challenge for business can therefore be framed by asking: what are the best firms in our industry and adjacent industries doing differently, what would it take to copy or improve on that, and which parts of our business model could be redesigned rather than merely digitised?

If firms do not take up that challenge, the gap between the frontier and the rest will keep widening, and so will the gap between the living standards we want and those the economy can sustain.

Chasing new value

It's early days in the AI adoption journey, but trends across the sectors show AI's transformative impact on business productivity is starting to emerge.

AI tools offer businesses unprecedented capabilities and the power to move ahead faster.

Productivity Commissioner Danielle Wood describes AI as a general-purpose technology with the potential to transform our economy and add an estimated 4 per cent to labour productivity over the next decade[5]. Delivering the 2026 Australia Oration in June this year, she stated: "If AI can increase the pace of innovation itself – making it easier to discover and adopt new ideas – the upside could be bigger still."

Productivity impact

A report by the Tech Council of Australia and Microsoft[6] estimates generative AI alone could contribute up to A$115 billion annually to the economy by 2030, depending on the pace of adoption. It projects A$30–80 billion would come from greater workforce productivity through automating routine tasks and that AI has the potential to automate or augment 44 per cent of Australian workers' task hours, freeing people to focus on higher-value activities.

While projected efficiency gains are impressive, the evidence base for realised productivity impacts is still emerging. "It's still too early to see significant effects in economic data," says the Grattan Institute's Sathanapally. The same thing happened in the 1990s with the computer and internet boom, points out Luci Ellis. "[It] took time for a new wave of technology to be fully adopted and embedded in business models and processes."

Gains beyond efficiency

However, a potential productivity power of AI is how it may be able to expand what organisations can do by improving

> If you have an engaged, passionate workforce who know their organisation is backing them, they're going to achieve great things.

Dhivyaa Thayalan
Head of AI Strategy, Partnerships, Education and Adoption, Westpac

decisions and creating new value. Retailers are turning to AI to forecast demand and optimise inventory. Manufacturers are using predictive analytics to anticipate equipment failures. Radiologists are relying on AI to improve diagnostic accuracy. Banks are applying it to detect fraud and improve credit decisions.

"We have built AI agents that work alongside different teams to help reduce customer delays when they apply for a mortgage," says Dhivyaa Thayalan, Westpac's Head of AI Strategy, Partnerships, Education and Adoption.

"Take customers' payslips, for example – we need to verify their accuracy, and this is where AI and our staff work hand-in-hand, assessing them together, helping reduce processing times and improve the customer experience."

New directions

A report from EY[7] shows AI usage at work is widespread. Almost 90 per cent of its survey respondents say they use AI at work, but only 28 per cent of organisations are positioned to turn AI deployment into high-value outcomes. It notes that when the technology is combined with factors like weak culture, insufficient learning and misaligned rewards, productivity benefits lag by more than 40 per cent.

"When you roll out AI, you need to support employees with the help and education they need," says Thayalan. "I think people underestimate the appetite their employees have for this. If you have an engaged, passionate workforce who know their organisation is backing them, they're going to achieve great things."

Thayalan points to Westpac's own approach to AI adoption.

"A defining factor is the level of engagement," she says. "Everyone is trained in a way tailored to their role, to make sure they're set up to succeed."

While AI holds much promise, Thayalan says technology investment alone is not enough to transform productivity. "For me, it's less about 'how are you measuring productivity', and more about, 'how am I building the future workforce of Australia?' That's genuinely where we're at."

Productivity takeaways: Working with AI

AI is more than a cost-cutting tool
The biggest opportunities come from improving decisions, creating new products and unlocking new ways of working.

Identify where AI can remove friction
Focus on customer pain points, operational bottlenecks and time-consuming processes.

Redesign work around people and technology
The strongest results will come from combining AI capability with human judgement, creativity and expertise.

Invest in AI skills across the workforce
Adoption depends on employees having the confidence and capability to use AI effectively.

Bring employees with you
Clear communication, training and leadership support will determine whether AI creates value or resistance.

CASE STUDY

MBSPro

Artificial intelligence is already improving clinical outcomes in healthcare – from flagging life-threatening conditions on a radiology scan in seconds to tailoring cancer treatment to a patient's own genetic makeup.

For general practitioner Dr Casey Going, it's also relieving administrative burdens, freeing up more time to spend with patients and boosting productivity across the four medical practices he co-owns with his wife and fellow GP, Yesenia.

In early 2025, Going and co-founder Dr Gishan Ratnayake launched MBSPro[8], an AI-powered medical practice platform designed to reduce administrative workload for general practitioners.

It serves as an AI medical scribe during consultations, suggests Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) billing items based on the consultation context to reduce missed billing opportunities and administrative errors, and supports care plans, health assessments and clinical decisions through AI-powered tools.

"There were two main problems we wanted to solve," says Going. "The first was efficiency – GPs deal with an enormous cognitive load during every consultation. We're listening to the patient, reviewing pathology results, reading specialist letters, checking medications and trying to type notes at the same time. It's incredibly demanding."

"Having an AI scribe that can accurately write your notes removes a significant burden and allows you to focus on the patient rather than the keyboard."

- Dr Casey Going
  Co-founder, MBSPro

The second challenge, says Going, was the financial sustainability of general practice. "The MBS is quite complex and, in many cases, opaque. For example, a patient might present with diabetes, be pregnant and identify as Indigenous. There could be several Medicare item numbers that apply to that consultation. Working out the most appropriate billing code while you're reviewing results, listening to the patient and making clinical decisions – all in real time – is extremely difficult."

Going says many GPs default to a standard consultation Medicare item because it's quick and familiar. "But that can mean patients miss out on rebates they're actually entitled to receive, increasing their out-of-pocket costs," he explains.

"At the same time, practices may not be billing appropriately for the work they're doing. Better billing doesn't just support the viability of the practice – it allows us to invest in better equipment, better facilities and better services for our patients."

According to MBSPro, some practices using the platform have reported billing improvements of up to 20 per cent. "It only costs A$100 a month and GPs get that back and more based on their billings, and then there's the productivity gains through efficiency," he says.

MBSPro estimates the platform may save some users up to one to two hours a day on administrative tasks.

The platform also has a clinical overlay to ensure accuracy. "We have a group of testers who thoroughly check that the clinical reasoning holds up. And the tool doesn't give diagnoses – it writes down what's being said, with that clinical layer applied."

In addition to Australian Privacy Principles, MBSPro holds cybersecurity standard certification ISO 27001 and complies with major electronic medical record systems. Going adds that the business has established review and oversight processes designed to support the accuracy and appropriate use of the platform.

"We need to make sure we're meeting standards and doing right by our clinicians and their patients."

Building cultural capabilities

Employee engagement is also key to productive workplace culture, but Gen Z is arriving with fresh takes on purpose and belonging.

Workplace culture is about the environment an organisation creates through shared values, behaviours and attitudes.

The latest Director Sentiment Index[9], released by the Australian Institute of Company Directors, shows the nation's corporate leaders believe culture has the greatest impact on productivity (56 per cent).

So, how do Australia's top businesses build cultural capability? Adam Jacobs, co-founder of leading Gen Z talent platform Hatch, says they follow the rules of employee engagement. "When people are more engaged and motivated, they're more productive," he says.

Engagement as a productivity driver

Data from Gallup[10] shows low employee engagement in 2025 cost the world economy approximately US$10 trillion in lost productivity, or 9 per cent of GDP.

The annual Hatch Hotlist[11] research reveals key factors that drive engagement among young Australians at work. Jacobs has observed a shift toward the desire for a "fundamentally strong job opportunity".

"This means three things: the first is very clear growth paths," he says. "My advice to employers is that it's okay not to know exactly what your future strategy is, but the more you can make clear the pathways, and the clearer your stance on AI within your organisation, the more you'll be able to attract, engage and keep that next generation."

The second factor, says Jacobs, is inclusive, healthy workplaces that promote a sense of belonging. This includes things like fair financial remuneration and a workplace where they feel safe, and that helps to create stability in their life."

The third is a connection to purpose, which Jacobs describes as a growing priority among young workers. "Young people are entering the workforce at a time of shifting ground, so what do they hold onto? They want work with a purpose they genuinely care about, because even though the work itself might change, they know they believe in what it's for."

How smart bosses make teams more productive

Smart leaders recognise the roadblocks to productivity and seek to smooth the runway.

"The proper focus for a boss should be, 'what are the things wasting people's time', not 'how do I keep them in the office longer'," says Sathanapally.

"What are the drags, the inefficiencies, the annoyances that stop people getting the most out of the effort they're putting in at work? Some of that is systems and processes, some is learning and development and training, some is technological tools."

Education, training and upskilling

Research from LinkedIn[12] shows only 36 per cent of organisations fall into the 'career development champions' category', with robust programs that yield business results. Compared to non-champions, they are 32 per cent more likely to be deploying AI training programs and 88 per cent more likely to offer career-enhancing project-based learning.

Hatch data shows young people see AI as an opportunity to grow their career faster, have more impact and build new skills. And while almost 90 per cent feel they have at least some AI capabilities, the data shows just 24 per cent are learning to use AI through employer training programs. Jacobs says most are learning "in the wild" through YouTube tutorials.

"Younger people are excited about working with AI," says Jacobs. "The more leadership can provide clear direction for an organisation and set up the culture and ways of working to walk towards it, the more productive it will be."

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Adam Jacobs
Co-founder, Hatch

Productivity takeaways: Culture transformers

Design jobs for growth, not just delivery
Roles that allow people to learn new skills and grow are more likely to attract and retain talent.

Build engagement through the basics
Fair pay, supportive managers, flexibility, inclusion and a sense of belonging remain critical drivers of performance.

Give people tools to learn
Upskilling works best when development is embedded into work, not treated as an optional extra.

Define your purpose clearly
People want to understand what their work contributes to and why it matters.

Remove productivity blockers
Look for inefficient processes, unclear priorities and unnecessary tasks that slow teams down.

Train leaders to create clarity
Teams perform better when they understand the goals, priorities and expectations they are working towards.

CASE STUDY

endota

Values are more than words on an office wall – they are the foundation of workplace culture and a driver of productivity and business growth.

That's the view of Melanie Gleeson, co-founder of wellbeing brand endota, which has grown from a single spa in Victoria's Mornington Peninsula in 2000 to Australia's biggest wellness network spanning more than 100 spas across the country, a skincare product range and a dedicated wellness college.

The company's growth is due in part to the explosion of the US$6.8 trillion global wellness economy[13], but Gleeson says its culture has ensured sustainable success.

"We have awards built around our values – intent, connect, truth and balance," says Gleeson. "We run our induction program around them, we're constantly talking about them with our network, and we shape our communication, KPIs and reviews around how we operate against them."

The brand's values are also embedded into training and development, which has been vital to building a pipeline of skilled therapists. "We also give therapists a career pathway – one who started as a therapist is now our business development manager selling franchises."

The endota Wellness College[14], which trains aspiring beauty therapists through its Diploma of Beauty Therapy program, launched in 2018 and has more than 1,000 graduates, 80 per cent of whom now work in the health and wellness field[15], and most in an endota spa.

"During the pandemic, the college shifted most of the course online while many other colleges closed for lockdown," says Gleeson. "After lockdown, students completed the practical component and, because we'd kept their learning going, we had a workforce ready to go."

The business increasingly draws on data to deepen its understanding of customer needs and Westpac DataX[16], the bank's data analytics business, helps deliver these insights.

"We work really hard at understanding the customer and the more data and system capability we have, the more we can do this," says Gleeson.

"DataX also helps us identify growth opportunities, such as which states we already have strong awareness in, and where we could grow. What we've seen from the DataX reports is that our industry has contracted slightly overall, but our share of the market has grown. For us, that speaks to the care, brand trust and customer loyalty we've built."

The business is also expanding its technology systems to help drive efficiencies and productivity. "We've spent about A$5 million on systems recently, and now we're in a phase of optimising what we've put in, which also leads to AI and how that can help optimise further."

"But from a spa perspective, AI is nowhere near our treatments, and it won't ever be," adds Gleeson. "We use AI at head office to help us work more efficiently, but the heart of our service will always be human connection and the power of touch."

"We work really hard at understanding the customer and the more data and system capability we have, the more we can do this."

– Melanie Gleeson
  Co-founder, endota

Reconfiguring the world of work

The rapidly shifting skills mix required to boost productivity means switching focus to adaptability, critical thinking, diversity and more.

By 2030, Millennial and Gen Z workers will make up 74 per cent of the workforce[17]. However, research from Sydney University[18] shows that since 1991, the share of older workers in the Australian labour market has doubled, with the largest increase in workers aged 55-64.

It finds that the focus on diversity and inclusion in the workforce rarely covers conversations about age and that policies and practices relating to older workers usually focus on retirement rather than supporting participation, productivity and engagement.

To create age-inclusive workforces, it highlights organisations' need to foster a culture that values diversity, while prioritising flexibility for everyone.

While flexibility is often associated with working from home, research from Hatch shows attitudes are changing. A quarter of young workers now want full-time in-office work, up from 12 per cent in 2025.

"The vast majority want some time in the office, because they recognise they need that time with colleagues to be coached and mentored," says Jacobs, adding office-based work is most valuable for young workers when it accelerates learning and connection.

"My advice for employers is to design in-office time in a way that promotes growth and connection."

Recruitment solutions in the regions

Hybrid work can expand recruitment beyond local labour markets, however, data from Jobs and Skills Australia[19] shows the gap between metropolitan and regional fill rates widened to 4.6 per cent in the 2026 March quarter.

MBSPro co-founder Casey Going co-owns four regional medical practices in southeast Queensland and says it can

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>
> **Adam Jacobs**
> Co-founder, Hatch

take up to 12 months to replace an employee, so his approach is "always be recruiting".

"In our main GP practice, we have about 32 doctors, and we always have the feelers out to recruit," he says. "And there are recruitment challenges beyond GPs and clinicians – it can be hard to recruit for admin and reception staff in regional locations, too."

To mitigate the impact of staff shortages, Going uses an AI receptionist to handle high call volumes and ensure patient service is maintained. He also focuses on workplace culture by treating doctors as customers.

"If we can improve our doctors' experience, they'll keep providing a good experience for patients," he says.

Diversity and job design

As the pace of change increases, adaptability is emerging as a vital skill for future success – an organisational necessity rather than an advantage.

Deloitte's 2026 Global Human Capital Trends survey[20] reveals that competitive advantage is driven less by technology differentiation but through human skills like adaptivity, creativity and judgement amid uncertainty and change. "Employers are telling us they're placing less importance on vocational or technical skills, particularly among young people, because those skills will be renewed so quickly in the workplace," says Jacobs.

"Our research shows employers value critical thinking and judgment the most, followed by communication and teamwork, and adaptability and initiative – the value that people can add that AI can't.

"We're seeing both a crisis and an opportunity," adds Jacobs. "The crisis is that a new pathway needs to be built to the workforce for the next generation, so they get more experience while studying and graduate with the skills the AI era requires.

"The opportunity is that if employers want more of those human skills in their organisation, they must invest in how they support young people to develop them by creating real-world experience alongside their studies, so that when they graduate, they're already one or two steps ahead. We should all be creating those opportunities now in our workplaces."

Hatch is currently working with major Australian universities to create a student pathway for paid work experience in some of Australia's leading organisations.

Productivity takeaways: Flex for success

Design jobs around skills, not assumptions
Move beyond traditional career paths and qualifications to identify the capabilities people can bring and develop.

Build flexibility into workforce design
Flexible work is not just about location — it is about creating roles that work for people at different life stages, ages and circumstances.

Think beyond generational stereotypes
A productive multigenerational workforce starts with understanding individual needs, not making assumptions based on age.

Use the office with purpose
In-person time is most valuable when it helps people accelerate their development and build relationships.

Hire for adaptability and human skills
Capabilities such as critical thinking, judgement, communication and teamwork will become increasingly valuable.

Create pathways into work earlier
Help build future talent by giving students and emerging workers opportunities to gain practical experience.

Humpty Doo Barramundi

Located in the Northern Territory between Darwin and Kakadu National Park, family-owned Humpty Doo Barramundi[21] is Australia's largest producer of saltwater barramundi.

Since its beginnings in 1993, the business has grown from producing 6kg of fish a week to more than 120 tonnes. And, as 60 per cent[22] of the barramundi consumed in Australia is imported, the company's CEO Dan Richards says there are opportunities for further growth through a focus on innovation and culture.

Founded by Richards' father, Bob, Humpty Doo Barramundi recently achieved Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) certification. Richards joined the business full-time two decades ago when there were four employees. Today, there are 150.

The company's innovative closed-loop saltwater wetland recirculation system, which channels water through native grasses, microalgae and natural bacteria to filter fish waste, has been a key driver of sustainable growth. It also uses AI for increased accuracy and better outcomes for the barramundi through initiatives like AI-powered fish counting tools and an AI-driven breeding app nicknamed "Barra-Tinder".

"We're addicted to improvement," says Richards. "We look for opportunities right across the business to explore and implement improvement continuously, which makes it fun. And our team is really empowered to drive those improvements, so culture matters enormously, along with the diversity in our team.

"We've got people from teenagers through to guys in their 70s, lots of young women coming into the business, and a schools' program that's brought 16 kids out from the local high school, 15 of whom have stayed long-term and are now training to become leaders."

The company also supports Indigenous Territorians through procurement, employment and staff training. It has a target of 10 per cent Indigenous employment as part of its Indigenous Engagement Strategy and recently developed a knowledge exchange program to support the remote Indigenous community Wadeye, which has community-led aspirations to develop its own fisheries and aquaculture business National Barra.

Richards believes connection to the region helps the long-term success of the business.

"But the other important thing is that diverse perspectives really help improve our ability to solve problems, and how we look at the growth of the business," he says. "There's a lot we get back from investing in a diverse, inclusive workforce with different perspectives.

"We've got underlying philosophies that my dad developed in the early days, and those still hold true: working with your community, working with your environment sustainably, working closely with your customers, and looking after the animals we love.

"Sticking to those principles, and continuously improving on each of them, has let the business move forward over time."

"There's a lot we get back from investing in a diverse, inclusive workforce with different perspectives. "

- Dan Richards
  CEO, Humpty Doo Barramundi

Prioritising productivity

Australia's productivity puzzle has no single solution, but it's an important conversation for every business across the country. What are the standout firms in your industry and adjacent industries doing differently? Could you adopt or even improve on their game-changing approaches? Is your current business model designed for sustainable success?

Westpac's *Building a Stronger Australia*[23] report, submitted to the Economic Reform Roundtable process in July 2025, noted that the most effective productivity improvements are practical and people-centred, combining investment in skills and capability, smarter use of technology and data, and inclusive workplaces that support participation and long-term employment.

The case studies featured throughout this report echo this approach, demonstrating that technology delivers its greatest productivity gains when people are equipped with the skills, confidence and workplace conditions to use it well.

For MBSPro, AI investment relieves administrative burden and, as Going puts it, reduces cognitive load, allowing GPs to focus more on the patient than the keyboard.

For companies like endota, productivity is built on the foundations of workplace culture. "For me, a productive workforce is one that's aligned to the purpose and clear on the direction of the business," says Gleeson. "That's foremost, because if we're all working towards the same goal, there's a lot more focus and momentum."

At Humpty Doo Barramundi, employee engagement underpins success. "Having a really stable, engaged workforce is crucial to our overall productivity and to the long-term health of the business," says Richards.

Support where it matters

Finding the right support, the capital and tools to help power up business productivity is also vital, and Westpac is committed to partnering with Australian businesses to support their next stage of growth.

We help customers to identify opportunities, access capital, improve efficiency and navigate change. Through banking solutions, data and insights, as well as support for innovation and capability building, we enable businesses to invest with confidence, strengthen competitiveness and focus on sustainable growth and productivity.

The productivity challenge will not be solved by technology alone. It will be driven by businesses that combine smarter tools with stronger leadership, more adaptable workforces and cultural capability that drives employee engagement.

This means identifying where change can make the greatest difference and directing investment to where it matters most. Westpac has over 200 years of experience partnering with Australian businesses to help them achieve their productivity goals, providing the capital and ongoing support for the future.

To continue the productivity conversation, speak to your Relationship Manager about how Westpac can support your business.

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https://www.humptydoobarramundi.com.au/

22 **60 per cent**
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A Westpac W Talks report in partnership with The Demographics Group

The Demographics Group Reference

Any references in this report to The Demographics Group or to insights attributed to Bernard Salt are sourced from a report commissioned by Westpac in July 2026. Westpac engaged The Demographics Group to provide demographic, workforce and productivity-related analysis to support the development of this report. The research examines the trends shaping Australia's productivity performance, including the impact of workforce participation, changing demographics, technology adoption, workforce diversity, leadership and evolving patterns of work.

The report, titled Productivity in Practice, September 2026, draws on trusted sources including the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the Productivity Commission, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Centre for Population and other relevant Australian and international research bodies, together with targeted desktop research and analysis. All referenced insights reflect this evidence base and the analytical work undertaken as part of this project.

This printed report includes references to digital content. Please access the digital version of W Talks: Productivity in Practice on Westpac IQ for full sources. For more business insights, follow Westpac Institutional and Business on LinkedIn.

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